

We claim:

1 1. A method comprising:
2 determining, based on profit management considerations, a subscription to
3 at least one product available for sale by a vending machine, the subscription
4 including at least one term that defines at least one product which may be
5 redeemed pursuant to the subscription;
6 outputting an offer to purchase the subscription;
7 receiving an indication of acceptance of the offer;
8 registering the subscription;
9 outputting a code; and
10 receiving the code and a request to redeem a unit of a product pursuant to
11 the subscription.

1 2. The method of claim 1, in which the at least one term that defines at least
2 one product which may be redeemed pursuant to the subscription defines
3 a category of product, and
4 a number of units of products included in the category which may be
5 redeemed.

1 3. The method of claim 2, further comprising:
2 receiving a request to redeem a unit of a selected product pursuant to the
3 subscription; and
4 determining whether the selected product is included in the category.

- 1 4. The method of claim 2, further comprising:
2 defining the category by determining which of a set of all products
3 available for sale are included in the category.
- 1 5. The method of claim 2, further comprising:
2 outputting an indication of products which are included in the category.
- 1 6. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
2 receiving from a customer a selection of a subscription of a plurality of
3 subscriptions.
- 1 7. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
2 receiving an indication of an amount of currency that is tendered to the
3 vending machine;
4 determining whether the amount is greater than a predetermined threshold;
5 and
6 performing the step of outputting an offer to purchase the subscription
7 based on determining whether the amount is greater than a predetermined
8 threshold.
- 1 8. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
2 generating a code.

- 1 9. The method of claim 8, in which generating a code comprises:
2 receiving a seven digit number from a customer via a keypad.
- 1 10. The method of claim 8, further comprising:
2 storing the code in association with the subscription, thereby allowing the
3 subscription to be determined from the code.
- 1 11. The method of claim 1, in which determining a subscription based on
2 profitability considerations comprises:
3 selecting a product from a plurality of products based on at least one of:
4 an actual sales rate of the selected product,
5 an ideal sales rate of the selected product,
6 a desired inventory level of the selected product.
- 1 12. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
2 determining that sales volume for the vending machine at a point in time
3 exceeds a threshold; and
4 determining a subscription including at least one term that defines a
5 predetermined period of time for redemption.
- 1 13. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
2 receiving, from a customer, a request to purchase a subscription to a
3 predetermined number of units of a product; and
4 calculating a price for the requested subscription based on profit
5 management considerations.

1 14. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
2 receiving the code;
3 receiving an indication of payment;
4 improving at least one term of the subscription.

1 15. The method of claim 14, in which improving at least one term of the
2 subscription comprises:
3 adjusting a term that defines a number of units of products which may be
4 redeemed.

1 16. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
2 providing an offer to recharge the subscription.

1 17. The method of claim 16, in which providing an offer to recharge the
2 subscription comprises:
3 determining a number of units remaining for redemption on the
4 subscription; and
5 providing an offer to recharge the subscription if the number of units
6 remaining is less than a predetermined threshold.

1 18. A method comprising:
2 receiving an indication of a value of currency that is tendered to the
3 vending machine;
4 determining whether the value is greater than a predetermined threshold;
5 determining a subscription to at least one product available for sale by a
6 vending machine, the subscription including at least one term that defines
7 a category of product, and
8 a number of units of products included in the category which may
9 be redeemed;
10 outputting an offer to purchase the subscription based on determining
11 whether the value is greater than a predetermined threshold.
12 receiving an indication of acceptance of the offer;
13 registering the subscription;
14 outputting a code; and
15 receiving the code;
16 receiving a request to redeem a unit of a selected product pursuant to the
17 subscription;
18 determining whether the selected product is included in the category; and
19 dispensing the product if it is determined that the selected product is
20 included in the category.

1 19. The method of claim 18, further comprising:
2 receiving the code;
3 receiving an indication of payment;
4 improving at least one term of the subscription.

1 20. The method of claim 19, in which improving at least one term of the
2 subscription comprises:
3 adjusting a term that defines a number of units of products which may be
4 redeemed.

1 21. The method of claim 18, further comprising:
2 providing an offer to recharge the subscription.

1 22. A method comprising:
2 receiving a code via an input device of a vending machine;
3 determining a subscription that correspond to the code, the subscription
4 including at least one term that defines a number of units of products available for
5 sale by a vending machine, which number of units may be redeemed;
6 determining, from the code, a financial account identifier;
7 determining whether the number of units is below a predetermined
8 threshold;
9 extracting payment using the financial account identifier if the number of
10 units is below a predetermined threshold; and
11 increasing the number of units that may be redeemed if the number of units
12 is below a predetermined threshold.

1 23. The method of claim 22, in which the financial account identifier comprises
2 a credit card number.

1 24. The method of claim 22, further comprising:
2 receiving an indication to activate automatic renewal.

- 1 25. The method of claim 22, further comprising:
2 determining whether an indication to activate automatic renewal has been
3 received; and
4 in which extracting payment using the financial account identifier if the
5 number of units is below a predetermined threshold is performed only if an
6 indication to activate automatic renewal has been received.